

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT
NORTH ADAMS

INFORMANT: ESTHER G. HARTRANFT

INTERVIEWER: NANCY HART

DATE: JUNE 2, 1988

N = NANCY

E = ESTHER

SG-NA-T019-T020

Our narrator this morning is Esther Hartranft of Luce Road in Williamstown. She was a Sprague employee for many years. The interviewer is Nancy Hart. The date is June 2, 1988.

N: I think we'll start Esther, by talking a little bit about your family background. The outline that you've had a chance to look at ahead of time mentions your grandparents and their names as a starting off place.

E: Yes. All right. My grand, my grandfather was Samuel Mort [spells M-O-R-T], [N: M-O-R-T, all right] in England, [N: uh huh] and never came to America. My mother came when she was partly grown [N: umhm] and settled here in the Fall River and Boston area. [N: Oh!] And uh, we came up here (--) Well I was born up here, but the rest of the family belonged down in the eastern part of the state.

N: I see.

E: And uh, of course my father died when I was very young. So I just don't know how important that is to the basic history. My mother's name was, my grandmother's name was Rachel Mort. And they're buried in England. In fact I saw the, the family plot in one of [N: Oh that's wonderful!] the church cemeteries there, [N: yeah] when I was over last time.

N: What do you know about your father's parents? Probably a lot less because he died.

E: Yes, it is a lot less I'm sorry to say. We've been regretting it recently, not collecting the history more in greater detail. I just uh, I don't know why we were so negligent, but we were. But my, my father's family were from England of course. And he came over as a um, person who worked in the cotton mills. He used to recruit people from England and bring them over.

N: Oh really! [E: Yes] And where were these, the cotton mills?

E: Uh, well, in Fall River [N: umhm] and uh, in North Adams here [N: umhm] on, in Greylock. He was overseer in the mill there. And then my sister tells me that he used to take the trolley and go up to Bennington and sup (--) [N: from North Adams?] Yes, and supervise something, some mill up in Bennington. But that was all before I was born. So I'm not too familiar with it. [N: Yeah] But uh, she told about him bringing families over. Recruiting a man and then the wife would come over later and settle around here. And (--)

N: And that would be in the North Adams area?

E: In the North Adams, Greylock, [Blackenton] area. Yes, yes.

N: I see. How did your mother and her family get from the Fall River area up to North Adams?

E: Well, my mother married my father in Boston, and they came from Fall River. And they lived in Norwich, Connecticut for awhile. [N: Umhm] And then came up here, I suppose a job opportunity. [N: I see] And uh, he moved up, up into Greylock and uh, supervised that mill there. And that's how we come to settle in, in the North Adams and Williamstown area. [N: Umhm, yeah] My father was very active in Saint Andrews Church [N: in Blackenton?] in Blackenton. He played the organ. And uh, was treasurer (--)

N: Wonderful! I'm sure it was much larger than it is now.

E: Yes it was. There was a large Welch community in uh, in Blackenton at that time. [N: Uh huh] It was predominantly Welch people. [N: Uh huh] And uh, they did, they had a very active church there with uh, students from Williams College used to come and teach Sunday school [N: Oh really!] at Saint Andrews. And my sister could tell you a lot about the associations [N: yes] with the students in those days. And you can't help but notice the difference in the way the students conduct themselves and the way they dressed in those days, and how responsible they were and how involved they were. Of course a lot of the present day students are involved in church work too. But she likes to tell about how they came from where the Center of Development Economics is now.

N: The old Saint Anthony Hall.

E: Saint Anthony Hall. They, a good many of the students came from there, and to Blackenton and served as teachers to the Sunday school there. And I guess they had a large adult class there at Saint Andrews too. [N: Umhm]

N: As far as you remember then, both of your parents have English backgrounds.

E: Both have the English background, yes. And some of the family are still in England. Yes.

N: And where did your parents meet? They were both in this area then as young adults.

E: Yes. Down in the uh, in the eastern part of the state, because I have the marriage certificate in Boston. [N: Oh really? uh huh] And they were married in a Presbyterian Church, but they were both Anglican people.

N: Yeah. Do you know, and they, where did they, (--) How did they meet? Do you know?

E: No, I don't know that at all. Uh, I couldn't tell you. Never, never heard truly how it happened.

N: Yeah. Okay. So, where were you born?

E: I was born in Greylock. Um, which is, well there's a house there now. I can point it out. [N: Yeah] It's almost uh (--) Well let's see. There was a Kirshaw family on the corner right opposite Novtek's.

N: Oh, I know where that it.

E: And then there are two or three houses down, there's one with a tall spire on it actually, and I was born there.

N: Really? [E: Yes, and] And it's just off what is now Route 2?

E: Yes, exactly. It was 1913. [N: Umhm] So it goes back quite a ways. And there's been quite a change in that little area too. Then soon after that my father died and we moved to Blackenton. No, my father was living when we moved to Blackenton. And uh, he still was in charge of the mill there. And my sister tells about carrying dinner pails to two or three of the people who, [N: worked in the mill] who had worked in the mill. And of course they didn't have time off the way they do today for lunches. And I guess you took the dinner pails in and they ate while they were on the job as I understand it.

N: Yeah. How many brothers and sisters did you have?

E: I'm the seventh child in our family. Um, I have two brothers and a sister who are buried in (--) Two brothers are buried in Norwich, Connecticut, where I subsequently lived when I married. And a sister is buried in Fall River. And then I have another sister who died about twenty-six years ago and she was living in South Carolina. So she's living down (--) Now there are three of us left. [N: Uh huh] My brother Albert, who is 92. And my sister Katherine who will be 90 this year.

N: And I've met her. [E: Yes] She's in, at the Harper Center?

E: Yes she is, yes.

N: In Williamstown.

E: Yes. My brother lives in Harwichport on the Cape.

N: Oh. Are you planning a big celebration for your sister's 90th birthday.

E: Yeah. Well yes, I think we should. We had one for my brother. And uh, we haven't finalized the plans, but it will be something to celebrate, yes.

N: Great. Yeah. So you grew up in this area?

E: I grew up in this are. When my father died my mother moved to North Adams because my brother had to go to work. He was, he attended Bliss Business College, which was quite well known in North Adams at that time. Lots of people went. And he was studying business. He also worked in C. H. Cuttings on the corner of Main Street and State Street. Uh, I think the drug store is there now. Um, and Robert's superseded it and moved across the street. And uh, then my sister Katherine I guess went to work also. My, my brother was about seventeen when my father died.

N: Umhm. And you were very young?

E: I was nine months old. And there was just my uh, sister Ruth, my sister Katherine, and my brother Bert, and myself, and my mother. [N: Yup] And he was sort of the head of the family then for quite awhile. And looked after (--)

N: That was a lot of responsibility for a seventeen year old boy.

E: It was. I was a great responsibility. Because with a small child my mother couldn't do anything. And women didn't go out to work that way, you know, the way they do today. So he carried the burden for quite awhile.

N: You mentioned that you were just nine months old when you moved to North Adams. So probably that, your earliest memories are living in North Adams.

E: Yes they are. We lived in, on North Street in North Adams. And I went to the Johnson School, which is still in existence.

N: Is it really?

E: Though I've been reading recently that they're talking about tearing it down. I don't know what their plans are. Then for the seventh and eighth grades I went to Freeman's School. Now that's about a mile from where I lived. And um, (--)

N: Where is North Street, in North Adams?

E: Um, let's see. It's, runs East and West, parallel with River Street, but up on the top of the hill. [N: Umhm] It's the only [N: umhm] the farthest north [N: I see] actually in the town, in that particular area. River Street as you know, runs parallel with Route 2. And then North Street is up on the hill, running parallel with River Street. It runs over as far as Holten. From Tyler

Street to Holten Street. [N: I see] And we had a very nice house there, which the Arnold Print Works furnished to all it's employees.

N: Now who was working at Arnold Print Works?

E: That, at that point my brother was working in the office in Arnold Print Works.

N: I see. So when he was seventeen he (--)

E: Soon after that he got a job. Um, let's see. It was, William Arthur Gallette brought him in to the office. [N: Umhm] And uh, he worked there for a good many years. I just can't remember when he left. But he was in the, in the accounting department [N: umhm] in the office there.

N: Of course he had had the business [E: training, yes] training before he started.

E: Yes he had. And uh, he took care of payroll for awhile. And uh, well he worked there until he closed actually, [N: umhm] in, around 1941, 40, 41.

N: And he was provided with a house then that you all lived in?

E: Yes, we all lived in this house on North Street. Uh, it was number 116. It was an eight room house. And when I was about eleven, George Flood was interested in, in my brother. Very kind to him and suggested that he buy the house across the street, which was a seven room house. And uh, at that time you could buy a house with um, much less than they are today of course. And so my brother did, he bought the house at 216 North Street. And we lived there until I married.

N: Umhm. You, I had (--) You had said that you had gone to seventh and eighth grade in, [E: in Freeman] in Freeman.

E: Which was up on um, up by the hospital. [N: I see] Just below the hospital that's since been demolished. [N: Uh huh] That's [few words unclear]

N: Did you have to walk up that long hill?

E: Yes we walked. There were no buses, or anything. And everybody walked in those days. If you wanted to go downtown you walked. [N: Yeah] And uh, everybody walked. There were very very few cars. And the people who had cars would put them up during the winter. Jack them up and uh, take the batteries out, [N: yeah] and take them out again at the end of March usually, if the weather permitted. [N: Yeah] Because they didn't plow the roads or anything at that time.

N: And then after that?

E: After Freeman I went to Drury High School. And I graduated from Drury in 1930. And that of course was in the height of the depression. And there was no possible chance of going to

college at that time. [N: No] I went into work.

N: Where did you work then?

E: I worked in the Arnold Print Works, which was really (--) Well there were shoe factories at that time too, [N: umhm] but Arnold Print Works was the main source of uh, labor. And I went into the office and the purchasing department there. And worked with um, uh let's see, who was the (--) Well Brian [Adriance?] was the purchasing agent when I was working there. Albert [Grendy?] was the treasurer. Uh, Samuel Jones was the president of the Arnold Print Works. Um, Mr. Adams was the vice-president I think he was.

N: When you were in high school at Drury, did you take a business course then?

E: Yes, yes I did.

N: So what had you learned to do there?

E: Well I had typing, and english, [N: Umhm] um, the usual courses. Geography, and history, and french, and uh, book keeping, stenography. And I went into work right after I graduated in uh, I graduated in June and I went July 5th. Started in 1930. [N: No vacation] No vacation. And I guess we worked a year before we had a vacation there. And that would only be one week. [N: Umhm] And at that time you worked from eight o'clock in the morning [N: yeah] till 6 o'clock at night.

N: Did you take shorthand [E: yes] in high school too?

E: Yes. Yes I did [N: Unclear] And I used it when I started working in the purchasing department there. And um, I guess I worked there right up till 1940, when the plant was beginning to close. And then I went up to Sprague [N: I see] in 1941.

N: Didn't you feel that you were lucky to have a chance to get a job [E: Oh yes] so soon after you graduated?

E: Yes, very, very fortunate to. And we were well aware of our good fortune that I could go right in. It was a big help to supplement the family income, because my brother had since married, but was still helping my mother. He had bought the house next door to where we lived. [N: Umhm] Then it made it very nice because he had a lot of family support there. And uh, I worked at Sprague, or at um, Arnold Print Works until I was married in 1948.

N: So you were married in 9 (--)

E: 1948.

N: In '48? [E: Yes, and uh] I see. Where did you meet your husband?

E: Well he was a long time friend. In fact he was a friend of my good friend who had worked at

Sprague Electric, [N: Uh huh] Evelyn Andrew. And uh, they had been married and had a young son. But she wasn't very well and she died. [N: Oh] And um, about four years after died he uh, came back to North Adams and looked me up.

N: Wonderful!

E: It got going for a short while and the following year we were married.

N: So you had a stepson?

E: I have a stepson, yes.

N: I didn't realize that.

E: Yes, yes. It's uh, young Edwin is seven years older than my own son. [N: Uh huh] I was married in January 1948 and my son was born in January 5th, 1949.

N: Wonderful!

E: And my stepson was seven years old at the time.

N: Umhm. And uh, did you stay in North Adams, or?

E: No, I moved immediately to Norwich, Connecticut [N: umhm] where he worked in the, one of the [Arolak?] Mills, The National Dairy Division, [N: Umhm] Arolak. And uh, they spun a fiber which was similar to nylon, but of course they weren't quite big enough to compete with Dupont. [N: Yeah] And after many years they went out of business. [N: Umhm] But we lived in Norwich there for twelve years.

N: And that's where your son was born?

E: Yes.

N: Did you work during those twelve years?

E: No. No, I did not. No.

N: Just a house wife?

E: A house wife with two children. And that kept me quite busy.

N: Yeah, I'm sure.

E: And I enjoyed all of that, that part of our life. [N: Yeah] It was very interesting.

N: Had your husband grown up in North Adams?

E: No, he was from Pennsylvania. [N: Oh really?] Yes, he went to school at [Rensselaer?] and

met his first wife, being close to Rensilir. And um, that's how we got acquainted that way. [N: Uh huh] And uh, as I say, we lived in Norwich and, until that plant closed, and then we came back to Sprague Electric.

N: The whole family came back [E: yes] to Sprague Electric.

E: He got a job in Sprague Electric and was there only for a year when he died.

N: I see. What year did he die?

E: 1960.

N: 1960.

E: Yes, May 1960.

N: I see. So you were left with a fairly young family.

E: Yes. I had one boy. My older boy was in college. First year of the University of Connecticut.

N: I see. This is your husband's step (--) Your husband's son, and your stepson.

E: Son, yes. I never felt him as being a stepson. He was, we were always just (--) He was my son.

N: It sounds like it says something about you as a mother then.

E: Well I tell you, I was pleased one time when I was going to, attending my son's classes in Norwich, Connecticut. And I introduced myself to the teachers. She says, "oh yes, I would know." "You look, your son looks just like you."

N: Oh wonderful!

E: [Laughs] And of course he was my stepson [N: uh huh] actually, but (--)

N: So when your husband died, after he had been, you all had been back here in North Adams for a year.

E: Yes, for a year.

N: How old was he when he died?

E: Forty-nine. [N: Very young] Yes, yes. We were, we were out at a concert. David, the younger boy was playing in the school concert. All the schools were joining together at Drury to present the Spring concert. And at intermission my husband was stricken, taken to the

hospital, and he died within twenty minutes.

N: Was this a heart, heart, [E: heart attack, yes] heart attack. And then how old was your son David?

E: David was uh, just about eleven at that time.

N: So you were really left with two dependents [E: Yes] too?

E: Yes. Um, I know David said, when we came that night, on our way home, he said, "how are we going to exist?" he said. He was only eleven, but he was quite concerned. We had two dogs and a cat. And he said, "how will we feed the dogs and the cat?" You know, at eleven he was uh, concerned about his future.

N: And what did you tell him?

E: I said, "we'll do it just the same as we always did." "Everything will be all right." At that time I told him, he started to cry and I said, "now don't cry, everything is going to be all right." I do wish I had let him cry. He should have, he should have let it out at that time. But anyway, we, we were lucky and things went along just about the same. [N: Umhm] At that point I took a job in the, as parish secretary at Saint John's Church in North Adams. And uh (--)

N: Tell me about that?

E: Well it didn't pay very much. [Both laugh]

N: I'm sure it didn't.

E: Uh, not really enough for us to get along on, but I used other funds. And uh, we managed, we stayed in our same house. We lived in Blackenton at that time. And we had a big nine room house, which we liked so much. And we stayed there for about four years while I worked at um, at the uh, church. But by that time, after four years, the older boy was graduating and going into pharmacy. [N: Umhm] And David was ready, he was in high school, but getting ready to go to college. And I knew I couldn't manage that on twenty-five dollars a week from the church.

N: Twenty-five dollars a week?

E: Twenty-five dollars a week from the church. And so uh, I thought (--) The Sprague people had asked me to go back again. So I thought it was about time. And since David was getting a little older I thought I could do that. [N: Umhm] So I went in to Sprague and I worked for George Flood, who was treasurer of Sprague Electric at that time.

N: Was that a name you also mentioned in connection with the Arnold Print Works?

E: Yes. Yes. George Flood was a treasurer prior to Albert Grindy in the Arnold Print Works. He was considered to be a (--) He was a very prominent North Adams man. And uh, he was a

great person with finances. He brought many companies out of bankruptcy, into a viable state where they could continue their business. [N: Umhm] And even when the Arnold Print Works was getting to be defunct, he kept it going a good many years. And then he went to work for Sprague Electric also as treasurer. And uh, I worked, I worked for him. And that was very interesting. And I liked that. And then when he was ready to retire I went into the sales department [N: umhm] of uh, Sprague Electric.

N: Okay. Were there other people from Arnold Print that went into Sprague when Arnold Print (--)

E: Quite a number went. The good many people left the area and went to other businesses. In fact that's how my sister Ruth and her husband went to South Carolina. [N: I see] There was a cotton mill down there and he was um, uh, not a printer. What did he do? He was in the cotton business anyway, textile business. So that took them to South Carolina, because all of the textile mills were going south at that time.

N: Umhm, umhm. That's right.

E: Yes.

N: Labor was cheap.

E: It was a precarious time for a lot of people. They wondered how they would exist. But I do think that time will tell that they really, that everybody did better once they got out of the Arnold Print Works. You know this.

N: Umhm. Umhm. Uh, when David went to college, did he go someplace locally, or did he (--)

E: No. He went to um, up in New Hampshire to um (--) That was, when he was ready for college it was uh, in the beginning of the sixties, which was a very turbulent time. [N: Absolutely] And we were at war. [N: Umhm] And everyone was concerned about being drafted, and so forth. He had a, an inner ear problem, which kept him out. But I was a bit upset, because I wanted him to go to um (--) I can't think. Do you want to turn it off for [unclear]? [Tape is turned off and then on again] I had David enrolled in Babson um, after his first year at Nathaniel Hawthorne up in, in New Hampshire. Nathaniel Hawthorne was a new college and I wanted him to get into a better known college. And he was accepted at Babson, but the woman who was in charge of the draft board at North Adams said if he changed schools he would be drafted. And that was most upsetting and traumatic for me. So we, he stayed, he remained at Nathaniel Hawthorne, and finished there, graduated from there four years later.

N: That was, that's a four year college?

E: Yes, yes it was. It was a relatively new. I don't know when they started out, but he, he went through there. And he took a business course and got his Degree in Babson. And uh, in the meantime I was working at Sprague Electric. [N: Umhm] And uh, then I went from the sales department to the overseas department.

N: I see. Why don't we take a break now.

E: All right. [Tape shuts off and begins again]

N: Thank you for the coffee. [E: Oh] [Unclear]

E: Is it all right? Strong enough?

N: It's marvelous, absolutely.

E: I don't make uh (--) I don't drink coffee normally and uh (--)

N: It's delicious. Tell me again when you started at Sprague, and what the years were?

E: All ready? [N: Umhm] I started at Sprague in 1941 and I worked until 1948, [N: umhm] starting in the sales department. [N: Umhm] I worked for Julian Sprague first. And of course he died. [N: Umhm] And uh, then I worked for Neil Welch. And then I went in to work for Mr. Flood in the, in the treasurer's department.

N: Umhm. Is this all in this period from '41 to '48?

E: '41 to '48, yes.

N: Because I know you went back later on.

E: Yes, yes.

N: Uh, you started there then because the Arnold Print closed.

E: Closed, that's right.

N: So you were (--)

E: It was in the process of closing. I left before it actually closed, [N: umhm] which I've considered to my advantage to be able to get a job before I was really out of the Arnold Print Works. [N: Umhm] But they closed quite soon afterward. [N: Umhm] And uh, so.

N: Did Sprague welcome people coming from Arnold Print. I mean they were happy to have established responsible workers?

E: Yes. Yes, it was, it gave them quite a few new workers who were glad to get a job, anything. And they went in and trained for the particular departments they were required to be in. [N: Umhm] It did find a lot of employment, but I do know a lot of people left town because they didn't want to work, or couldn't work at Sprague's. [N: Umhm] And um, but (--)

N: When you started to work there were there other people in your family already there?

E: No. Nobody in my family worked there except (--)

N: How about people you had gone to Drury High School with?

E: Yes, some of the girls had already, had started in there. They weren't as fortunate as I in getting a job right away. [N: Right away] And when Sprague came uh, they started in and worked up and got really responsible positions [N: umhm] for the type of work they were doing, [N: umhm] and seemed to be quite satisfied. And they sort of grew with the company as they grew too. And at that time the company was up on Union Street, in the building up there. [N: Umhm] We used to [N: umhm], well we used to have to either walk up, or get rides. I can remember walking down to the North Adams Library and standing on the corner. And anybody who was working at Sprague's would automatically pick up anybody who was working up on Union Street.

N: It sounds like a good family feeling then.

E: It was. It was. I don't know how they do it today, but uh, [N: no] that's how people got there. Of course if you had your own car you didn't have to depend on somebody, but a good many people depended.

N: Now when you started at Sprague, which department did you start in?

E: In the sales department.

N: In the sales department. [E: Yes] And where was that in the plant?

E: In the old Beaver Street, on the third flood I think. As I recall, we walked up the stairs. And then they got an elevator and we could ride the elevator at times. [N: Umhm] Uh, but the, the switch board was up there and there were several offices, the accounting department. And I was in the private office with Mr. Flood at one time, and then in the sales department at a rather large area with many desks. I can't say off hand how many people worked there at the time. But I worked on government work. [N: Uh huh] I did government contract work. [N: Uh huh] Um, (--)

N: Did you need any special training when you went to Sprague from Arnold (--)

E: No, because it was still um, basically it was still office work. [N: Umhm] And uh (--)

N: So tell, and tell me, government work was your first job?

E: Yes. People would come from the government to uh, um, get contracts for Sprague to, to produce certain amounts, certain things that were needed, especially in the war effort. [N: Umhm] And uh, as Sprague was a big company, growing rapidly during the wartime.

N: Umhm. What was a typical day for you? What time did you start?

E: It was very busy. Uh, [chuckles] it (--) I guess it officially opened at 8:00, but I would always go in as near to 7:30 as I can get in there.

N: Really! Uh huh.

E: And get started. And uh, while I was in the, that during the wartime, I had a girl who worked under me and took dictation from me actually. But I of course, I handled these government contracts, and people would come from the government. I remember the time when they had this so called Manhattan Project, [N: oh yes!] which was very hush hush. And uh, even we didn't (--) Well we were told on the QT what it covered, but we had to be very quiet.

N: Really! Had you heard (--) Did you hear the term Manhattan Project at that time?

E: Oh yes! Yes. [N: Really!] It was, that was used. And you had priority ratings. Everybody had a priority rating for certain um, uh, certain uh, well certain contracts carried a priority. A (--)

N: Is that like a security clearance?

E: Uh, it meant that they were to get preference. And uh, they, it was, it was very, very very busy time. Men would come from the government and talk about it and then you'd have to sign the contract. I can remember George Flood always signed the government contracts once they were finished, or about to be signed. And uh, he didn't come in one day and this government contract had to be signed. And I could, I could write George Flood's name as well as he could. [Laughs] I thought anyway. And I knew that this contract had to go out. So I signed his name. And of course I kept a copy. And the next morning when he came in I told him that, that this contract had been signed. And he said, "who signed that? That's not my signature." [Laughs] I said, "I did." Oh, all right, all right. He said, that's okay. [N: Wonderful] So he uh, but we worked nights and we brought work home. Contracts and (--)

N: What about lunch hours? Did you have a long period?

E: Well we traditionally had an hour off for lunch. There was no cafeteria there. You'd have to go down to, downtown to get, or you brought your lunch in at that [unclear].

N: Which did you do?

E: I used to bring my lunch in. It gave me more time. [N: Yeah] I'd sit at my desk and eat my lunch and keep working till (--)

N: Did you get coffee or something? Did they have a coffee, or a snack bar?

E: Uh, I guess maybe they had a, a coffee machine. I'm not, it doesn't, I'm not sure. Eventually they put a cafeteria in and we could go there. And that was at the time when there were strikes also. I can remember going (--)

N: I'm going to ask you about that in a minute. Uh, when you um, you said you worked late. What was the official closing time?

E: Oh, I think 5:00 at that time. [N: Umhm] Probably six. 5:00 I think it was. [N: Yeah] Yes actually.

N: And in, then, but you said you worked beyond that?

E: I worked, I'd work over 6-7:00 at night and bring work home. And we never got overtime pay either.

N: No overtime?

E: No overtime pay at that time.

N: No time clock?

E: No. Uh, some people were on, punched the time clock. I never did. I never punched the time clock. And so I was on salary. And if you were on salary you were lucky. And you worked. You earned it. Uh, you just put in as much time as you needed to get the work done. And if you had to work late, you worked late.

N: Tell me about some of the later jobs that you had at Sprague, uh, during (--)

E: Well when I, I left Sprague in 1948 and I was still in the sales department working on government contracts. And um, that (--) Then I, I left to get married. And I didn't go back again until uh, 1959.

N: And then you worked from 1959 (--)

E: From, at 1959 uh, I was brought in, and I went down to the ceramic department, which was right at the very end of the most traumatic experience. To go in the main door and walk through the various corridors, and the lights kept getting dimmer and dimmer till you got down to the end of the building, which was the ceramic department. And I did office work there.

N: What building was that in?

E: It was on Marshall Street.

N: On Marshall Street. Umhm.

E: They had moved to Marshall Street after I was married. [N: Umhm] And uh, I got started in there. I only worked there a few months and then they brought me up into the sales department. It was understood when I went in that a job would open up into the sales department.

N: I see. So, and this was after your hus (--) near the time that your hus (--)

E: After my husband died, yes. [N: Died, uh huh] Yes. He'd been dead four years before I went back. [N: Uh huh] And uh, as I say, I had a boy in college and another one getting ready to go. So I remember starting in at seventy dollars. And the man who interviewed (--)

N: Seventy dollars? [E: A week] A week.

E: And uh, he said, "well you'll never send anybody to college on seventy dollars a week." I said (_0

N: It was better than St. John's, wasn't it? [Both laugh]

E: Yes. I said, "I know". But it was a foot in the door anyway.

N: Absolutely.

E: And so I worked there for a few months in that department. And then came up into the overseas department. The head of the overseas department interviewed me and I worked directly for him. And he eventually (--)

N: Who was?

E: That was Gerard Tremblay.

N: Tremblay.

E: [Spells] T R E M B L A Y. [E: Umhm] And he became the president of Sprague World Trade. [E: Oh really?] And I worked with him for a few years. And then he was transferred over to Switzerland, at the main office in Switzerland for the Overseas Department. [N: Umhm] And I did go over there in 1960, 1978. No, no. I have to change that date. Ultimately I went over to work for him for six months in [N: in Switzerland?] Switzerland. Yes. [N: Wonderful!] To uh (--) Well he had a very good girl over there. A Swiss girl who could speak several languages. And she was, she was good at communications, but she was terrible at office procedures. [Laughs]

N: Oh dear! Were you there to train her?

E: No. I went over to pick up the pieces [both laugh] that she had, it was sort of a mess. And I got it straightened out. [N: Wonderful!] And then I came back. But it was a nice experience.

N: Would you have liked to have stayed longer?

E: Yes I would, but you couldn't. If you had a Swiss person who could do the work you were doing, you, they wouldn't hire a (--)

N: They didn't want you to take the job of a native person.

E: No. No. Of course, being in an office wasn't uh, anything that was special. So they were able to get another girl in.

N: You mentioned that you earned seventy dollars a week [E: yes, to start] when you went back. Do you remember what your very first paycheck was like?

E: At Sprague? [N: Yes] Uh, let's see. I remember what it was like in the Arnold Print Works. I started in at sixteen dollars a week there. [N: Sixteen?] Yes, and that was considered very good. And I know my husband graduated from Rensselaer as a mechanical engineer and he started working at fifteen dollars a week. [N: Oh (unclear)] So we used to laugh about that. I felt I did pretty well. [N: Absolutely] And then of course, during the depression they cut us 15%, 12%. [N: Umhm, that's right] So I was down to something like eleven dollars a week at [N: this is at Arnold's?] Arnold Print Works for awhile. Then it went back up to maybe twenty-twenty-one when I was (--)

N: Would you guess that (--)

E: I, I think when I started to work at Sprague's I probably was start at maybe thirty dollars a week. [N: Uh huh, uh huh] And then I went up to fifty. [N: How long that much] That would be oh, maybe after four or five years [N: umhm] I got fifty dollars, which was pretty good at that time. [N: umhm] Considered to be.

[N: Absolutely] And of course we weren't paying as much in income tax at the time, [N: umhm] though social security was taken out. [N: Umhm]

N: What about special benefits. Every day, now everybody has a package. [E: Yes] [Unclear]

E: Well that was something that took place in the interim. [Sounds of chimes in background] When I left Sprague in 1948, and when I came back in 1965, [N: umhm] in the meantime there coffee breaks had become (--) I know the first time the buzzer rang and people left their desks, I asked what was happening? And they said, "oh, it's coffee break." And it was something that I found very difficult to catch on to. In the first place, I had coffee at home in the morning and I never was used to drinking coffee during the day. So I used to ignore the coffee breaks, and um, worked right through. [N: Umhm] But uh, coffee breaks were [unclear] I guess. And then as people came in I'm sure they, they got deals that were more advantageous to them. [N: Umhm] But there was a, eventually they brought in a pension for the workers. And I, when I went back in uh, '65 and I wasn't there too long, I was only there thirteen years. So I, I did get a small pension, but it's pretty minuscule [N: umhm] by today's standards. [N: yeah]

N: Uh, did you have a sense that men and women were paid the same for the same work? Or did they?

E: Well, I was aware of that fact as time went on. And when Mr. Tremblay went to Geneva, I stayed behind and another man came in, and I continued to work diligently. [N: Umhm] And I, I was always called a company worker, because I (--)

N: What did that mean?

E: Well, I, I worked overtime for nothing, and I'd take (--) People would throw paper away you know, if it had a crease in it, in the waste basket [N: oh dear!] and I used to fish it out and use it for scrap paper. They'd laugh at me. And I just, it went against the grain to, to be wasteful. [N: Uh huh] And uh, I can remember them laughing at me quite a bit for things like that.

N: Umhm. Were you aware of any health or safety problems, or conditions at Sprague?

E: Well I wasn't in, in a place where I was concerned about health or safety. [N: Yeah] We had a nurse there. And if you had a cold you could go and get a pill, [N: umhm] or anything. But uh, we did have insurance. Health insurance came along. [N: You did?] Yeah.

N: When did you get the health insurance?

E: Um, when I went back [N: the second time] in '65. Yes. [N: Umhm] You were automatically covered with (--) Nothing like it is today, [N: umhm] but you did have hospitalization.

N: So that was certainly an improved benefit?

E: Oh yes! That was a great benefit.

N: And the, as well as the coffee break.

E: [Laughs] Yes. Yes.

N: Tell me about uh, the people you worked with, your co-workers. Were they um, friendly?

E: Oh yes!

N: Supportive?

E: Yes. People were(--) In Sprague, while it was up at Beaver Street, it was really like a family. [N: Umhm] I know Mr. Sprague would very often take us home at night [N: Oh really!] if we were going out late. As I say, we'd work overtime and there was no bus, or way of getting down. I walked home many times. But if he had to be going out when you were going out, he'd take you home, right to your door. [N: Oh wonderful!] And it, it was (--)

N: Is this Julian, or Bob.

E: This was Bob, [N: uh huh] Bob Sprague. And there was a nice feeling. He was always so friendly with people, and interested in their, in them as individuals. [N: Umhm] He knew a lot about people and everybody liked him.

N: You mean he knew their backgrounds [E: Yes] and who they were related.

E: And everybody liked him. He was, [N: really?] he was uh, very very nice. It was only after the big strike that things changed.

N: Which is the big strike?

E: Well now I can't remember just what year it was, but it was when we were up at Beaver Street. And um, I can remember walking, going through the picket line and getting pushed pretty hard. [Tape clicks off and on]

N: I remember hearing that there was a strike in 1941. So that must have been shortly before, or shortly after you first went there.

E: Yes. I don't recall much about that particular strike, and I don't think the office was involved. [N: Uh huh] I know I wasn't.

N: You were not involved in that strike.

E: No. No I was not.

N: Did you belong to a union?

E: Never belonged to a union.

N: Well then the other strike that you referred to must be the, the big strike that lasted uh, for six weeks.

E: Yes, I recall that one very vividly.

N: Tell me about it.

E: We were working up in um, Beaver Street. And there was a big picket line there, and some of the company management people were there at the door to help us get through. But it wasn't a pleasant experience. Uh, I can remember getting pushed quite, quite roughly by the strikers. And of course they were not happy to see us go through the line.

N: What? Did they yell anything?

E: Yes. They, they yelled and shout and (--)

N: Do you remember what they said?

E: No, I'm sure it wasn't very pleasant. [N: laughs] But I, I just sort of closed my eyes and ducked in. [N: Uh huh] I can remember being shooed when I got upstairs, and they told me to go to the nurse. And I'd go to her. She probably gave me an aspirin or something. [N:

chuckles] And, but we continued to work [N: uh huh] uh, through that. And then there was one down in uh, on Marshall Street, which I think was the one that caused the most feeling among the management and workers. I don't know what date that would have been. [N: Umhm] But uh, and I remember going through the picket line there very vividly too. [N: Umhm] The people were on Marshall Street Gate House and they, they were, they were quite violent really. [N: Umhm] But I felt that it wasn't (--) I didn't feel that I had to support a strike. [N: Umhm] I personally felt I was doing all right. And I didn't feel a commitment to suffer with somebody who was antagonistic. [N: Umhm] And I guess it was the old feeling of loyalty. I just was glad to have a job, and I worked at my job and hoped other people would do the same.

N: Do you remember what the demands were of the people that were so vocal?

E: No. The details of it I didn't follow, because as I say, I was in the office and it didn't pertain to the office workers at all. We were not unionized at that time. In fact I never joined the union. [Sounds of a dog whimpering]

N: Umhm. Was there, was there pressure for you to join? Or pressure not to?

E: Yes. Later on when they, they tried to organize a union for the office, they, they did [unclear].

N: How did they go about doing that?

E: Well I, I suppose they had meetings to recruit people, but I was really outside the pail of unionism, because I was a private secretary all of the time. [N: Umhm] And I just, it, my job was never unionized. [N: Umhm] I never, I never supported the union.

N: Was there pressure on you not to support a union?

E: No, no, never, never. That was all (--)

N: So it was your decision?

E: Oh definitely.

N: Completely. [E: Yes] Did (--) What were the changes after the six week strike that you said there was some bitterness after that?

E: Well there was. There was feeling against the people who had continued to work, because we did benefit from the strike.

N: How did you benefit?

E: Well your pay automatically went up too. You got the same benefits. And I guess I felt a little guilty about that. I was glad to have the benefits without having been through the strike. [N: Umhm] I look at it a little differently now than I did at that particular time.

N: How do you look at (--) How did you look at it then?

E: I, I felt (--)

SIDE ONE END

BEGIN SIDE TWO

SIDE TWO BEGINS WITH INTERVIEWER IN MID-SENTENCE.

N: ...thought about the strike differently at the time that you do, as you look back over it. You were starting to tell me how you felt about it at the time, that you were doing you job.

E: Yes. I looked at it just from my own personal, small viewpoint. [N: Umhm] Uh, I was satisfied with my job. I thought I was doing well enough. Uh, and so I felt I had a responsibility to work. And I continued to do so. And I didn't feel sympathetic at all to the, to the people who were on strike. [Tape clicks off and on]

N: When you think back over it, how do you feel diff(--) You mentioned that you felt differently about it now.

E: Yes. I, I've come to uh, have a different view point between management and workers today. I see it from a different angle. [Dog barks] Having been retired and noticing how times have changed. And I think we owe a lot to the people who did try to strike for better conditions. Could I put the dog out. [N: Sure] I think she wants to go. [Tape clicks off and on]

N: So now you think you would be more sympathetic?

E: Yes. I'd perhaps look at it at (--) I think perhaps I cheated myself [N: In what way?] in that working. I perhaps was too satisfied with my conditions under which I worked. [N: Umhm] Uh, knowing now what people ask for and get. But it never occurred to me at that time [N: umhm] to try for anything better. Uh, I just took whatever they gave me and assumed they were paying me what they thought I was worth. [N: umhm] Now I think you have to have a better opinion of yourself, and know what you feel you're worth [N: umhm] in comparison to other people. Otherwise you do get the short end of the stick sometimes.

N: Do you think that they maybe took advantage of your good nature and your loyalty?

E: Uh, yes I, I think that's quite possible. I think it's quite possible. I didn't feel it at any time while I worked. It was only after retirement then I learned several things that I didn't know about at that time. That I was surprised and a little [shagrinned?].

N: What, what, what are those things?

E: Well um, a lot of people were getting a lot more pay than I was getting. And I know they were not as qualified and doing as, as sincere a job. [Sound of chimes in background] I'm sure of that end of it. [N: Umhm] And it uh, a little disconcerting [N: yes] to fell that you short-changed yourself. I don't blame anybody else but myself. [N: Umhm] But then as I say, I have a different perspective now.

N: Yeah. You think you might have been more assertive in terms of your own value to them?

E: Yes. Yes. Yes, definitely.

N: When, did you have to asked for promotions and raises, or did you, was it their initiative? Or how did that come about?

E: They were um, generally they, they re-evaluated people in the beginning of the year and they gave you an automatic increase [unclear]. [N: Oh really?] Yes. [N: Uh huh] Yes. And I always seemed satisfied. I was satisfied at that time. [N: Uh huh] Um, I do remember one, when I went to Europe uh, I missed an increase at that time. And uh, the following year, when Mr. Ward had taken uh, responsibility for the department I was in, he said uh, "oh, you didn't get a raise last year?" And I said, "no, I was in Europe." And he just laughed and nothing was done.

N: Nothing was done?

E: And I, I (--) It wasn't till later that I realized I was short changing myself in the sense that when it came time to retire my social security was less than it should have been.

N: It wasn't just the salary you were getting, but it was your pension and your social security [E: yes] that were affected down the line.

E: And I never, never once thought about those things until, until I retire, [Chuckles] which is my own fault. But now, as I say, I've gotten smarter since, got older, but it was too late. [N: wee late] Too late. Down, down. [Must be telling dog stay get down]

N: Did you have any particular friends in the office where you worked?

E: Yes. I have a friend who still is my friend. [N: Good] And uh, she worked under the same circumstances as I did.

N: Did she save paper too?

E: Yes she did! She was (--) And uh, in fact she was uh, even more astute than I in the sense that if she found she had picked up a pencil and brought it home, inadvertently she'd be sure to take it back the next morning. [Both laugh] But there weren't many people that way [unclear]. [Tells dog: down, down, get down. Lye down now, be a good girl. Get down]

N: Fine. Uh, what did the executives that you worked for call you? Did they call you by your

first name?

E: Uh, yes. Yes, I guess I was always called Esther. But I always called the man I worked for by his um, Mr. Tremblay, Mr. Welch. A lot of the workers called my boss by his first name, [N: really?] which was upsetting to me, but that was the trend! It uh, they didn't seem to think anything of it. A lot of the higher management were called by their first names.

N: By the (--)

E: By the employees.

N: Employees? Really? [E: Yes] Even then?

E: Yes. And everybody(--) When I went back the second time, from '65 to '78, any girl who worked in an office was automatically called a secretary. But when I left in uh, in forty-eight, only certain few were secretaries. The rest were clerks. But I don't think anybody was called a clerk in '65 to '78 when I left. They were all secretaries.

N: Were the women called by their first names?

E: Yes. I don't know of anybody who was called formally by Miss, or Mrs.

N: Umhm. Umhm. Did they ever ask you? Or did they just?

E: No. It just seemed perfectly all right at that time, [N: umhm] because we were, we were friendly and uh, there wasn't a stiff relationship at all.

N: Umhm, umhm. Were some of the people, did you have lunch with some of the people that were there?

E: Yes. But even when I, before I left I continued to go down to the cafeteria and get my sandwich and bring it up to my desk and eat it there. [N: Umhm] I did on occasion (--)

N: Was there, were there places to sit in the cafeteria too? I mean it was also a dining room?

E: Oh yes. They had a very nice cafeteria. Very nice cafeteria. And uh, sometimes I sat there and joined others, but a good many people would go up town at lunch time. And either go to a restaurant up there, or do shopping, or something. [N: Umhm] And uh, uh, I just, I was quite content. I had a nice private office and I used to sit in my own office and have my coffee and sandwich and then go back to work. [Chuckles]

N: Yes. Were any of the women there mothers with young children, or school age children?

E: There were (--) When I left there were a few young women with children who had the problem of having to be out occasionally because of circumstances demanding their attention. [N: Umhm] Yes, a few, but most of them were either older, or uh, without children.

N: Umhm. Who cared for their children? Do you know?

E: I think family.

N: Umhm. There was no day-care center?

E: No. No. It wasn't till later that they (--)

N: Umhm. What was the hardest part of the work?

E: I can't think at this point of anything that was terribly hard. I knew what I was suppose to do. I knew my job and did it. Um, I can't think of anything that was difficult at the time that I would remember.

N: What was the most fun?

E: I suppose getting your paycheck. [Laughs]

N: I bet it was.

E: Oh yes. Um, and going up to the bank and cashing it. And doing shopping around sometimes at noontime. You were right close to any bargains that happened to be for sale, you know. And you could pick them up and things like that.

N: Were you paid on Thursday?

E: Uh, I was paid twice a month.

N: Oh, you were salary. [E: Yes] [Unclear] Umhm.

E: Yes. And um, but I can't think of any (--) We had parties occasionally, but.

N: Tell me about them.

E: Um, well they. One of the perks, instead of a raise I guess, they made me a member of the management club, which I never could understand. [Both laugh] So that entitled me to go to the Sprague dinners every month when they'd have management club meetings.

N: What kind, what were these dinners about?

E: Well it was really a nice chance to have good roast beef, or fish, or something at um, a good restaurant. We would go over to 1896, or the Three Chefs, or [N: umhm] the one down in Adams there. Uh, oh dear, I can't think of the name. It's still in existence. They put on very good dinners and we'd have excellent meals there. Full course roast beef dinner was excellent! I haven't had any good roast beef since I got through. And of course that's gone down the drain

now since (--)

N: Yeah. Well who went to the management dinners?

E: People who had management responsibilities used to.

N: Did they all go every time?

E: Well, toward the end there must have been over a hundred, or a hundred and fifty I would say, that would come to the dinners, [N: Umhm, umhm] because the dinners were good. And they'd have speakers and some sort of program.

N: Were they, did you have speakers within Sprague, or outside?

E: They'd bring them (--) Sometimes management would speak, or uh, sometimes they'd bring people from outside occasionally.

N: And this was a dress up affair sort of?

E: Well, toward the later part of uh, the seventies, nobody would be dressed too much. [Laughs] You know, they were quite casual.

N: Did you have a cocktail hour?

E: They did have a cocktail hour. I never participated. I always felt uncomfortable about getting up to the bar with women. It never appealed to me particularly. So. And I happened to go with my friend who was not a drinker. So we'd go and we'd have some of the oeuvres ahead of time, but no drinks.

N: Umhm. No drinks.

E: No. But a lot of people, that was a big important part of the dinner. It was a very popular time, the cocktail hour. [N: umhm] It uh, they did good business I'm sure.

N: Yes. How many women, what percentage of the people that went to these dinners were women?

E: Well toward the end, in the late seventies when I was there, um, maybe, maybe forty percent were women, sixty percent men.

N: Umhm. Were there any women in management, in high positions in management?

E: They were just beginning to get there. Now uh, when I left one of the girls took uh, the Head of the Sales Overseas Department and had a very responsible and high position.

N: This was Mr. Tremblay's job?

E: Well what he used to do originally, yes.

N: Yeah. Was then (--)

E: It went eventually to a girl who uh, who had been as a private secretary. [N: Really?] And uh, they, she, she got the promotion and did very well at it.

N: Umhm. What were the (--) Were there any issues of conflict that you're aware of?

E: Uh, between management and work?

N: Yes.

E: Oh I'm sure there were a lot out in the plant, but nothing that I ever came in contact with, or had anything to do with.

N: What (--) Did you hear about? What did you hear about?

E: Well I just hear rumors. I, I never mixed too much. I always felt that it was best to remained not so much aloof as in my own sphere, because if, if you knew anything, they'd ask you.

N: Who would ask you?

E: Uh, people, workers would ask you. And the strange part was, they would hear about rumors long before I knew things as fact.

N: I see. You mean the people that worked in the plants would ask the people [E: they'd like] that worked in the offices [E: sometimes, yes] to verify a rumor?

E: To verify a rumor, yes. And many times they were correct. And we [N: how do you?] who were close to the management would be, hear about it later.

N: There were leaks?

E: Leaks, apparently so. It was always a source of amusement and interest to find that was true. But the rumors generally uh, turned out to be accurate [unclear].

N: What were the (--) Can you give me some examples of rumors?

E: Well, [pause] uh, oh it would be pretty difficult to do it at this point. [N: Yeah, uh huh] Yes. But when there were changes in management, or somebody was going to be let go, the rumor would precede the act. [N: I see] And uh, and that I was right up there on what we call Mahogany Row and the many times I didn't know that (--)

N: Mahogany Row, that's wonderful!

E: That was uh, that was where the offices, the big offices where the presidents [N: umhm] and vice presidents, so forth. And uh, and people farther down the line would know things that were going to take place long before I did, many times. And then if I did know it I never felt I wanted to say anything. I wasn't much good at prevaricating. [N: Yeah] And I, I would, [N: So you would] I stayed away so I wouldn't run into a circumstance where I'd have to deny or confirm anything. [N: Right] And uh, [unclear].

N: You, it sounds like you wanted to be loyal to the people you worked for, [E: That's, oh yes, definitely] but you didn't want to (--)

E: I felt it was(--) Well when you were a private secretary in those days, it meant just that. You were private. Nothing went outside the office. You never talked to anybody about what, what you did. And uh, (--)

N: It was confidential.

E: It was a confidential, yes. Yes.

N: So then perhaps is what you're saying that you didn't want to know things, so that if you were asked [E: well no.] by a plant person then you can really say you didn't (--)

E: No. If I knew something, sometimes I knew what they were saying wasn't so, [N: uh huh] uh, but it was always astonishing to me to find that they did know things that turned out to be fact. But no, if I knew anything that was actually contradictory to what the rumor was, I would never correct it or anything. I just uh, just played dumb.

N: You distanced yourself. [E: Yes, yes, yes] Yeah, yeah.

E: That was the only way to proceed actually [N: I'm sure] in a job like that.

N: And probably at the time when the unions coming in and the time that the strikes were being considered and going on, that was even a more vulnerable time.

E: Oh yes. Oh yes. [Dog is whimpering in background] Yeah. [Whispers: Get down, get down, down].

N: You mentioned that you did not participate in the strikes. And that you were kind of bumped and shouted at [E: Oh yes, anybody who went through] during the times.

E: The, the um, some of the management people would stand there and sort of help you through [N: umhm, umhm] the line. And uh, give a little protection.

N: Do you remember any incidents when the executives went through? Were they yanked?

E: Well they had a, some of the executives were on good terms with the people who were

workers, you know? They had grown up with them in the, from the beginning of the company. And so there was a lot of comradery. Uh, you know, they'd sort of laugh and understood what the situation was. And they'd, they'd get the insult some time, but in a jocular way. Uh, I don't think they ever suffered any abuse actually. There was a, I think on the whole, a good feeling between management and (--) Now that almost sounds contradictory, but some of the managers of different departments uh, had to be loyal to the executives. [N: Absolutely] But uh, the workers I think understood that distinction. [N: Umhm] I would say that they could walk through and there was an understanding that they had to do it.

N: Umhm, umhm. How did the, (--) you're working for Sprague both times affect your home life?

E: Well, since my husband was uh, gone, uh, it, it was a little difficult for me. I felt that when you had children you should be home. [N: Umhm] But it was really important that I go to work to not use all of my income before I was ready to retire. [Sound of chimes in background] So I, I felt I had to work. There was no question about that. [N: Umhm] Uh, the older boy was in college and the younger boy was in high school. I regret (--) Even in high school I think that the children need a little supervision. Perhaps more so in one way. You know, you can't, you can't have a babysitter for them, and you uh, yet you have a responsibility to them to be there.

N: And at that time you were a one parent family.

E: One parent, yes. yes.

N: So you had to do everything.

E: I had to work and uh, well we managed, but.

N: Tell me about the friends you had? Were they mostly Sprague people that you saw on the outside? Or were they, did they have jobs outside?

E: Well, running a home and um, and, well my family took priority over everything. I didn't have what I would call a social life. [N: Umhm] I think people would feel deprived today. I didn't at the time. I felt this is, this is it. I have a responsibility at home. I have to work eight hours a day. And when I come home, I worked at home. And I really had a very limited social life. Church on Sunday was about all I went to. And uh, (--)

N: Was that your main community activity then?

E: Yes. I think I attended concerts. I did take time off for that, [N: Umhm] when the evening at the college and so forth. But uh, I, I guess I just didn't have a social life. [N: Umhm] And people would feel deprived today. You know, they say I have a responsibility to myself. Well I never felt quite that way. My, I don't feel that I was a martyr at all. [N: Umhm] It just seemed that was the way to do it. [N: Umhm] You waited till later to get what you could for a social life.

N: Was there any sense of pressure to be involved in community activities by Sprague?

E: No. No.

N: Sometimes companies want their employees to have high level of visibility.

E: Yes. Yeah. No, that was never a (--) No, the Management Club did do some outside activities, but I didn't get involved in that. They did do community things. They (--)

N: What else did (--) They had the (--)

E: They had the [N: the dinners], the dinners. And then they had Santa Fund and they, they gave money to Little League. [Unclear] They collected dues and so forth. [N: Umhm] And they, they uh, sponsored several community things.

N: For North Adams pri, primarily?

E: For North Adams, yes, basically. Yeah.

N: There are a number of different ethnic groups in North Adams that probably worked for Sprague. An Italian group?

E: I would say when I was there most of them were Italian.

N: Umhm. [E: Yes] Did the Italian people seem to stick together and Polish people?

E: Well when I was growing up um, the Italian people were mostly centered on State Street. [N: Umhm] But as time went on they began to be absorbed into the community, and in fact became the predominant people in the community. [N: Really?] Yes, yes. It went from uh, what you might say, Wasp [N: yup] to uh, to Italian [N: umhm] and uh, maybe French, a few French. [N: Umhm] Yes, there were several French. And the Adams people were Polish people.

N: Umhm, umhm. Let's go back to the 1930's that you mentioned when we started. Uh, what was North Adams like in the depression era? You have any special memories of that?

E: Well, I, I think I have stronger memories of growing up in North Adams as a younger person, [N: umhm] before 1930's. It was a community where there was a lot of respect for authority. [N: umhm] And uh, I know my mother and I would go downtown Saturday night and the Salvation Army would be playing on the corner of the Boston store there. And people (--)

N: Which is the Boston store?

E: What was England's, is just out of business.

N: I see. Was called (--)

E: But that was the Boston store originally. [N: Umhm] And people did their what they called, trading. They came in from Clarksburg and Stamford and outline districts and did their shopping and so forth. But everything was orderly. The policemen new everybody I think. And they, they had a nice appearance of authority. Their shoes were always polished. [N: Umhm] And they swung their night sticks and [N: umhm] walked up and down the street. And there was very little um, of what you have today. There was very little crime that I knew of growing up. Um, what was your question in the beginning? I can't think of it now.

N: I was asking about the depression. [E: Oh, lately (--)] Were there people that were hungry? Do you remember people (--) You were mostly in high school at that time.

E: Uh, yes. I don't think I was aware of the crash. I heard about the crash. But not having any stocks or anything, it didn't actual involve us. [N: Umhm] And it wasn't until we began to get um, reduction in pays that we realized this.

N: Now tell me about the reduction in pay? [E: Well] This was at, when you were back at the Print Shop?

E: The Print Works, yes. They, they said in order to keep the business going it would be necessary to cut pays. [N: umhm] And we said, "oh, how will we ever get along?" "We're just barely existing now, getting by." To take a 10% cut was (--) [N: Umhm] Well I can tell you an interesting story that I'm sure somebody wouldn't, some many people wouldn't believe. But while I worked in the Arnold Print Works in the Purchasing Department, I guess I was getting back up to about sixteen dollars a week. And I got up my courage to ask for a raise. [N: Oh!] And I went in to the Treasurer and he said, "well yes, I guess you deserve a raise." "We'll give you twenty-five cents a week extra." Well I was thrilled. Believe it or now, twenty-five cents a week. Well ten weeks went by before I got anything. [Dog barks in background]

N: So you got your twenty-five cents (--)

E: Well ten weeks went by and my pay remained the same as it was. And so I finally got up courage, and it took a lot of courage to go into the treasurer and say, "you promised me an increase and I haven't received it." "Oh!, he said, you haven't got it yet?" And I said, "no." "Well I'll see to it that it comes." So the next week I got my twenty-five cent increase, but it was not retroactive, which would have [N: oh no!] been two dollars and a half for ten weeks. And they never, they never made it retroactive. [N: They still owe you] But that, that indicates the, the spirit of the times, you know. [N: Umhm] The worker was really the worker. And you just were glad to have a job. [N: Uh huh, yeah] And of course that was in the depression era too.

N: Yeah. Do you have any sense of how Sprague was different during that period than it was later on?

E: No. Because when I went in, I went in in the forties. And the depression was over at that time.

N: Did they cut people?

E: I guess they did at that time too. I'm sure they did. Yes.

N: And probably paychecks as well as workers?

E: I'm sure. Well I, I would assume so, because that's the way it was at the Arnold Print Works.

N: Umhm, umhm. And how about World War II? That must have made some dramatic changes.

E: Well that, that was a big change. But of course pays began to go up at that time and work increased, and Sprague really began to develop into a worldwide business that was very well known. [N: umhm] And they were the leaders in components at that time. And, and uh, I'm sure it was a, a time of progress.

N: Did they trouble getting enough workers during World War II? Do you remember? Or(--)

E: I guess there was a pretty good work force in North Adams as I recall. I, I don't think they had any problem that way. They may have, but I wasn't aware of it.

N: Yeah. So the war ended in '45 and that was sort of in the middle of your first time there. [E: Yes, yes.] How did that affect your job?

E: Well the government contract continued and I, I worked, as I say, until I left to be married. And I was still working on government contracts at that time.

N: Yeah. So your job did not change as it, at the end of the war?

E: No, no, it did not. No, no. I don't think many office jobs changed a great deal, but I'm sure production did, because they made different things for the war effort. And uh, and then of course with research we're always developing new things and new departments were springing up I guess. [N: Umhm] But as an office worker it didn't make much difference.

N: Thank you. This has been great!

E: Well I hope I've helped, but I (--)

N: You have indeed. We (--)

E: I didn't think I had much to tell you.

N: You found you had a great deal didn't you?

E: I don't know whether this would be of any interest to you?

N: I would love to read (--) This is the obituary [E: of Julian] of Julian Sprague.

E: He was very well liked. [N: He was] He was, yes.

N: A very fine looking man, wasn't he?

E: Yes he was. A very, very good man.

N: And that was (--)

E: Of course Bob was a good man too. But they were different.

N: Were they cousins or brothers?

E: Brothers.

N: Brothers. Uh, can we meet again?

E: If you need to. [N: I would love (--)] Do you want me to get Rita [unclear] too, to (--)

N: Would you be willing to ask her if she would be willing to be interviewed too?

E: Yeah, sure, sure.

N: And why don't we make a time for next week? [E: All right] And we'll start in again.

E: Okay, that's [unclear].

N: Thank you very much.

E: Oh, you're very welcome.

TAPE ENDS

SG-NA-T020

Our Narrator's name is Esther Hartranft. My Name is Nancy Hart. The day is June 8TH, 1988. We are meeting in Mrs. Hartranft home on Luce Road in Williamstown, Massachusetts. This is our second interview. The name of the project is, "Shifting Gears, The Changing Meaning Of Work In Massachusetts."

E: I don't know why, one is connected to the switch and one is free.

N: We have something them like that too. I think I mixed you up last week when we were talking about your husband going to Sprague. And you mentioned 1959 and you're going back. And I think that, I misunderstood what you said. You were not working at Sprague at that time?

E: No, I wasn't. We had just moved back from Connecticut. And my husband went into work at Sprague in 1959. [N: Umhm] And uh, was there a very short time when he died.

N: Yeah. And your time then at Sprague was 1941 to 1948, and then 1965 to 1978.

E: That's correct. [N: Great] That's correct. [Sound of dog barking in background]

N: I (--) You're work(--) Talking about the unions was very interesting. And what it was like to cross the picket lines. And when you started talking about that I immediately said, "oh, the six week strike." But I think that you were referring to the strike in 1970, which was the ten week strike. [E: Yes, that's correct. That is correct.] Fine. I wonder, thinking back about these two different times when you were working with Sprague, from '41 to '48 and then comparing it with the time that you went back from 1965 to '78, what were some of the changes that you noticed when you went back?

E: Oh, there were great changes had taken place in the interim. And the thing that struck me when I went back the second time, was that people had more liberties in that there were coffee breaks had been established. And uh, people were smoking at the desk [unclear].

N: Oh really? Was there no smoking at the desk?

E: Previously. [N: Before] Yes, people just automatically didn't smoke. [Tape turns off and then on again]

N: Can you think of some other things that were, seemed different to you?

E: Well I (--) Personally the whole attitude of the worker to me had changed completely. Um, I had grown up when you were so thankful to have a job. You just stuck at it and did your very best. And worked overtime without complaining. But in the later years there was a lot of independence. And I suppose some of it was because more jobs were available. And if they didn't like conditions, or had any friction, they could go and find another job, either comparable, or better.

N: Do you mean another job within Sprague? Or another job in North Adams?

E: No, elsewhere. I think a lot of people went to G.E. in Pittsfield. [N: Oh really?] Yes. Yes, they found the conditions were a little more agreeable in the sense of uh, more benefits, [N: umhm] better pay actually. So a good many started to drift off there.

N: Were there any other places that they drifted off to?

E: I don't know of anything else particular. I never paid much attention to that, but I do know

that people left from time to time, or they moved out of town for some other reason.

N: Yeah. But for the first time then they weren't solely dependent on Sprague for a job.

E: I think that was a feeling, the general feeling. That uh, if this didn't pan out they could go elsewhere and find something that would [unclear].

N: Umhm, umhm. So that gave them cent more.

E: More independence, yes. And um, I think people were less um, well in the old days you uh, you respected and revered your superiors. And uh, everybody was more or less on an equal plane in the later years. Um, everybody was equal in the sense. [N: I see] You know, there was a great deal of first name calling. Um, nobody observed the formality of Mr. & Mrs., it was on a general first name basis most of the time.

N: Sort of like the telephone operators now.

E: Yes, yes. I guess that's all (--)

N: Who call you by your first name.

E: Yes, and nurses who greet you, [N: yes, yes.] regardless of age or anything.

N: Absolutely. Uh, do you think that there were more, there were more benefits I think you mentioned before.

E: Yes, I guess there were. Um, having been in the office all of my life and on salary, I, well I wasn't on pension prior to the later years, but uh, (--)

N: I see. So your pension benefits only started when you went (--)

E: Very, very late for me. [N: That's too bad] For the office I had just thirteen years before I finished, before I retired. So actually my pension is quite low. But uh, there was a time when you never expected to even have a pension. [N: Really] But the people in the, in the plant themselves, the regular workers, the hourly workers had a pension I think before we did. [N: Oh really?] I think that was so, yes.

N: Umhm. What about health insurance?

E: Yes, we had that benefit later, and uh, you were able to go and have annual checkups and the company paid for the biggest part of that. Yes, and those did continue to increase in, in benefits to the worker as time went by.

N: Could you go to your own doctor?

E: Yes. Yes. Yes you could.

N: Umhm. And there were no health benefits when you worked there [E: originally] originally?

E: No, no, not at all. In fact after I left I know they had increased benefits, such as dental coverage and things, which I never had. But that became the general rule afterward.

N: What was the difference (--) Was there any difference in atmosphere? You mentioned that it seemed like everybody was equal and there was more of a first name basis than before.

E: Yes. There were, it was um (--) I don't know how you would characterize it, but I would say maybe a let-down. I know I worked in the main offices upstairs. And I was always surprised when I went back the second time to find that um, the factory workers, when they were let out earlier at 4:00, 3:30, 4:00, they'd come down the office isles to use the office entrance and exit, whereas they could have gone through their own exit farther down in the plant. And they were quite noisy and [voisterous?] and made no attempt to uh, control their, their talking as they went by. It was very disturbing. But no one in authority ever said anything about it, but I can recall the days when that would never have been permitted to happen. But uh, it was [unclear].

N: A certain kind of assertiveness that it took to go through executive offices, isn't it?

E: Yes, yes. Yes, I thought so. And just a few of us would remark about it, but [unclear].

N: I was wondering, did people mention it who were (--)

E: Only a few. [N: Uh huh] Only a few of the older ones who knew that it was a departure from the usual way of behavior [N: umhm] from workers. [N: Umhm] But it always was, it was a bit amusing as well as frustrating sometimes. [N: Sure] Because that, when they were exiting it was so noisy and (--)

N: Would they come by near the desks?

E: Well I was in a private office, but my door was always opened. And you could hear them going by and everybody else could to.

N: Uh huh. That certainly is a change in atmosphere, isn't it?

E: Oh definite, definitely the attitude was totally different from what it was originally.

N: Yeah. Was there anything else like that? That's a very interesting kind of thing to happen.

E: Well off hand now I've been out ten years and I don't, nothing comes to mind immediately about any great changes. But that was indicative of some of the general attitude [N: umhm] that signified the changes that were going on. [Dog barking in background]

N: Umhm. What was the hardest thing when you went back the second time?

E: I think coping with that change. Um, the informality and the sort of looseness the way it struck me. [N: umhm] It was a little bit difficult, but you, you have to accept those changes and become a part of them to some degree. [N: Yeah]

N: Did women change their clothes? In other words were there people, women wearing pants in the office?

E: Oh, yes. As I was in my later years, when I was close to retiring, more and more women came in with pant suits on. Some were quite nice, some I thought were a little bit too informal for office work, but there again you couldn't condemn anyone for what they wore. [N: Umhm] It was no longer permissible to (--)

N: What do you think would have happened if somebody wore a pair of pants in 1942?

E: Oh, I, I think someone would have spoken. [N: Umhm, umhm] Someone in authority would have discreetly suggested that maybe it wasn't quite the thing to wear. But I, I never felt myself that dungarees had any part in the office work, but as I said, when, when I was first there um, anybody who worked as a secretary was different from the clerk. But when I went back everybody was a secretary. And there was no such thing as a clerk, even though they were doing what we called clerking jobs.

N: What are the differences between a secretary's job and a clerk?

E: Well a secretary would work for just one person. [N: Oh!] And do the dictation and filing and keep, be in control of that particular office. [N: Umhm] Whereas a clerk might float and do filing for somebody, or run machines, duplicating machines and things of that nature. Do auditing.

N: It was more like a pool.

E: And uh, would be in a different, well like in the Purchasing Department or something, where there would be a number of people working. Number of people in the same large office. And, but, and they would be considered clerks formally, but now they were secretaries.

N: Did they do typing too? [E: Yes] Did the clerks do typing?

E: Oh yes. Yes, yes. But when I left they were, they were hiring people who could not take dictation and they were called secretaries. Of course they had machines to take the tapes off and transcribe from tapes. [N: Umhm] But uh, the old timers were a little bit uh, well, what shall I say? Didn't think much of that as being classified as a total private secretary. [N: Umhm] They certainly weren't private secretaries. And their abilities were not commensurate with what I felt they should be at that time.

N: What about their salaries?

E: Uh, they did pretty well! They did pretty well, because times were changing [N: yes] and

uh, I think they uh (--) I never paid too much attention to what other people got. I thought I was fortunate. [N: Umhm] I found out since that I wasn't as fortunate as I thought I was. But uh, there again, if you're satisfied, why worry about it, what the other person is getting.

N: Umhm, umhm. Uh, I'm wondering, what did (--) Presumably during World War II the men wore jackets and ties. [E: Oh yes, and] What about later on? Did they, was there [E: yes], were they more informal too?

E: Yes they were. They would come in with sweaters on, maybe turtlenecks. And certainly in the wintertime they wore sweaters. [N: Really?] Umhm. And sometimes a jacket over it, a sports jacket, but there were very few who maintained the um, business coat and tie, suit business. You know, um, the formality of that. The executives did of course, but there were some executives that wore sweaters.

N: That's what I was wondering about.

E: Yes, yes there were. Yup.

N: What do you guess it's like now?

E: I wonder. I would like to uh, just poke by or be a fly on the wall to observe what's going on. I certainly hear stories that are surprising to me.

N: Tell me one.

E: Well I just think that there's so much freedom and looseness and very good salaries. It's unbelievable, the salaries. I know when they moved down to Mansfield, not to Mansfield but to Lexington I heard that the girls were getting, the clerk/secretaries were getting \$500.00 a week, which seemed enormous. And they, the reports were coming back, they couldn't type and they didn't know anything about the business. But the labor pool there was being taken from the Boston area.

N: There was a lot of competition to get [E: Yes.] workers probably.

E: Yes. Yes. Yes, that quality of the work was not what you would have hoped it would be.

N: Umhm. It sounds like the girl that worked for Mr. Tremblay in Switzerland doesn't (--)

E: Well she was very capable in the sense that she had, could speak five languages, which was important answering the phone there. But her, her abilities to take dictation and to file were lacking and as a result was caos there for awhile. Yes.

N: Umhm. You mentioned that you had belonged to the Management Club. [E: Yes] Was that, that seemed like a friendly kind of (--) What was the atmosphere?

E: Oh, it was very friendly there and it was a perk for a good many people. [N: Umhm]

Increasingly so in the later years.

N: This is in the 1970's that I'm talking about now.

E: Yes. Um, as I say, I in no way felt that I was management oriented in that I worked for a superior, but I didn't manage anybody else. I never could understand why I was put on management. But it was a perk. I was given that opportunity to go to management dinners, which were very nice and very friendly. [N: Umhm] Uh, but there again it was a structure that had sort of become loose.

N: How?

E: Well, there were so many people who were admitted to the Management Club who admittedly were not management people. So I don't know just what the criteria were to become a member of the management club.

N: What would the jobs be that they might hold, even if they belonged to the Management Club?

E: Oh, the, the people out in, in the plant. The men who had supervision of a department were managers. And uh (--)

N: Were they also non-union members, or union members?

E: I think most of them were probably union members actually. [N: Umhm] And uh, the management men themselves were probably not union people. [N: Umhm] But their people immediately under them might have been.

N: And they might have, [N: and they were a part of it] they were a part of it too. What do you think was behind the establishment of the Management Club?

E: Well basically it was to do good in the community. They sponsored uh, little leagues [N: umhm] and different things [N: Umhm] that were community oriented. And I think that was the basic premise for establishing it, as well as the comradery of the workers themselves.

N: Do you happen to have any idea when it was established?

E: I couldn't tell you just when, but I think it must have been in the interim while I was gone [N: umhm] from '70 (--)

N: So it was in place when you went back?

E: Yes, yes, definitely. [N: Umhm] Yeah.

N: That's interesting that secretaries, clerks are now secretaries and that some of the men who were supervisors in plants are now management. [E: Yes, yes] So everybody has an upgraded

title if not job.

E: That's right. We used to laugh about uh, instead of giving you a raise (--) This was not applicable to Sprague alone, but it was I guess a joke that was prevalent. If you wanted a raise, instead of giving you a raise they'd give you another telephone on your desk.

N: Oh that's wonderful. Yeah, yeah. [E: But] Why don't we stop here for just a second. [E: Okay]

[Tape shuts off and on again]

That was good coffee.

Unknown voice: That is good coffee.

E: Oh, it's Sanka.

N: Is it? [E: Yeah] It's wonderful. Uh, you talked last time a little bit about what went on during what you called the big strike. And I was, mixed it up. But you were talking about the one that lasted ten weeks.

E: Yes. It was a very tensed time for everybody. Crossing the picket line and there was always that feeling that if some of your friends or acquaintances were on the other side. And I guess there was a lot of feeling between people at that time. But I was sort of isolated myself. [N: Umhm] Being as I was, a private secretary in a private office. Once I got through the picket line I, that was it. But I was conscious of the fact that there was strike close by. And it did have a lasting impression on everybody after. Even after it was settled there was always that feeling that there were the strikers and the non-strikers. And uh, the non-strikers benefited from the striking. They got the increases in wages and pension benefits. And um, I suppose there was call for it. I was always anti-union, but I am sympathetic to them, especially more so now. I think they really (--) Well I have to qualify that. I, I think unions have gotten a little bit too strong and the quality of people in management of them sometimes was questionable. But on the whole they had to come. It was the time for the unions to change society in a way that had to be changed in the twentieth century.

N: Umhm. Do you think that the workers would eventually have gotten those benefits if they hadn't struck?

E: I don't know how it would have come about without taking the stand. It was a bit of a revolution. And you have to go through a revolution to get change. [N: Umhm] I (--) No, I think they were the vanguard of change. And for that they deserve a bit of respect. But they got, became powerful and power corrupts. And it's just like exchanging places in a sense, with the former power echelon. [N: Umhm] But there's no (--) Of course today unions are a little bit, not quite so popular as they were in the seventies.

N: This is true. A lot of union officials and (--)

E: Yes, yes. They've been corrupt and have spoiled the thing for everybody. It was a necessary

part of growth I think. [N: Umhm]

N: It must have taken some courage to walk through that picket line?

E: It really did. It was quite formidable to approach them. And they stood shoulder to shoulder. You just had [N: oh really!], oh yes, you had to push your way through. And I (--) The first time I did it, I was, got through and was a bit shook up. [N: Umhm] And um, I was advised to go to the office nurse and just get something to quiet me down, because it was, it was traumatic. I shook when I got in there. And every morning to see them and of course they knew you were going to go through. And here again, people like Neil Welch who was, became president of the company, would stand there and help you through. And the workers themselves liked Neil Welch. [N: Oh really] But they were very friendly (--)

N: He was a pos (--) [E: Yes] Oh really.

E: So he was able to joke with them and say, "let them through." You know, [N: umhm] and helped us to get through. But uh, there was a mixture of animosity and friendliness [N: umhm] and understanding I think at that time.

N: When you said they, they stood shoulder to shoulder, then they were not walking in a circle with placards.

E: Uh, I guess now they have to walk. [N: Oh, but they] I think, I think, I think it's required that if you're striking you have to walk, keep going, or moving, or something. But as I remember, it was a blockage there at the gate.

N: So you had to push to get through?

E: We had to push to get through. And I went, they pushed me back you know. They shoved me from one side. But I wasn't the only one. There were others who went through at the same time.

N: Do you remember anyone being hurt?

E: No. No. No, only your feelings were bruised.

N: I'm sure they were. Did they shout anything?

E: I'm sure they did, but I think I was sort of numb when I went through. [N: Yeah] I don't remember anything particular. I'm sure there was a lot of yelling.

N: It was noisy.

E: But uh, what they said I don't remember.

N: Were there, were there men and women?

E: Yes. Of course the women are more vociferous than the men really.

N: Yes. Yeah.

E: Uh, I guess that's always the way. They were quite ambitious in a sense.

N: Umhm. They probably would have said some (--) May have been more, as you say, more vocal.

E: Yes, they were very vocal. Very vocal.

N: Yeah. Did they know you name?

E: Some did I'm sure. [N: Umhm] Yes.

N: What was it like do you remember, when the strike was settled? Was there a party, or celebration? How?

E: I don't know how the union behaved, whether they had any celebrations, but for myself and some of my counterparts, life just went on as usual. [N: Umhm] And you were just relieved that there were no more visible tension there. [N: Umhm]

N: Was there ever (--) Were there strike leaders who were particularly well known, or [E: Oh I think so] who directed it?

E: The union people who were leading it were very well known. Their names were in the papers [N: Umhm] and they had their following. Yes, they were [unclear].

N: What kind of publicity was there? It stay (--) It lasted for ten weeks. So it must have (--)

E: There was (--) I'm sure there was a lot in the paper. I, as I say, it's become clouded to me now. [N: Sure] I don't recall too much. [N: Umhm] It was just a hard time and everyone was glad it was over [N: I'm sure] when it was over.

N: Yeah. And then you finished up in 1978.

E: Yes, I became 65 and uh, on my last day and left. And in those days, before the break-up of Sprague, when you had worked awhile you were given a nice party. [N: Umhm] And uh, I had a very nice party.

N: Tell me about it?

E: Well I was surprised. I truly was surprised, because one of the girls that worked in the other office, who was a friend of mine said, "two or three of us would like to take you out for dinner on your last day." [N: Umhm] And I said, "that would be nice", you know. So I, I went with

them up to the um, the Inn in North Adams there. It was fairly new then. And when I got there, my goodness, I, I don't know for sure, but there must have been over a hundred. [N: Oh really!] I, I was truly bold over. It was a surprise for sure. I had no idea. But behind the scenes they had gotten other people to come, you know. And so I had quite a send off up there.

N: Was Bob Sprague there?

E: I don't think so, but some of my (--) Mr. Tremblay was there. [N: Oh, wonderful!] And um, Albert Shure and two or three others of the big men management. [N: Uh huh] And uh, it was a very nice party. And I was just [unclear].

N: Did they make speeches?

E: Yes they did. And uh, I had to get up and thank them too for it.

N: Did you get a present?

E: Yes. I got a watch. [Unclear]

N: They really did get you a watch at a retirement party?

E: Yes. There was a watch and uh, [N: wonderful] what else was it? Something else. I just, oh that's terrible, I just can't remember what the other gift was. Anyway, it was very nice and [few words unclear]. But I was truly (--) I didn't think, you know, having been more or less reserved and staying in my private office that (--) Well I knew people by, by sight and a few by names. I was really shook to see so many people came to it.

N: It's a wonderful tribute, isn't it?

E: It was surprising.

N: Yeah. Tell me, you mentioned before that your retirement benefits were really only based on your time.

E: That's right. And, and my first stint that, the first uh, 1941 to '48 didn't count as service time at Sprague. [Unclear] it was only at what, from the second half of my being there. So I actually had thirteen years. [N: Umhm] And I guess I got the minimum pension at the time.

N: Um dear. Did they, does that go up with the cost of living?

E: No. No.

N: Oh really!

E: No. That's been the same right along. And uh, (--)

N: So when people retire they really do live in very fixed incomes.

E: Yes, definitely. But I do know that uh, I've learned since that some of the people who retired at the time I did and subsequently ended up with a very comfortable social security [N: umhm] and pension. So they're not unhappy I don't think at all. In fact, a good many of them travel quite extensively now. [N: Umhm] And I'm sure they had to have good income to do it. [N: Umhm] But they were fortunate. But I think they planned for their retirement in that sense that uh, they knew what it was going to be and they had unbroken service. [N: Umhm] So they were fortunate in that respect. [N: Umhm] But I, the tell you the truth I never even thought. I was looking forward to retirement. Doing the few things that I wanted to do. But I never thought of it in terms of money, [N: Umhm] which was stupid of me now. That's one of the things I would change if I were to do it all over. But uh, I just took what came and I knew they'd be social security and a small pension, and I, that was it.

N: You never thought about asking them to consider the time, the seven or eight years that you spent there during the 1940's, and all of the overtime and weekends that you put in?

E: It wouldn't (--) Nothing (--) No, there was nothing you could do about that. That, I'm sure that never, even if I had wanted to complain they were, it would not been any basis. They have to establish a basis I suppose, that the rules for which it would be eligible for a pension and that's it. They use your unbroken time from [N: umhm] your beginning to the end of your last stint.

N: Had they ever given you a pension for the short time that your husband had worked there?
[E: He] A widow's pension?

E: [Laughs] That, that, well that was unfortunate. He had been there just about a year. [N: Umhm] And what he got in retirement, not retirement but in death benefits just paid the funeral expenses. That's all.

N: Um. What are death benefits as Sprague define them?

E: Well I guess if you've been there a long time you would do, you would have a reasonably good benefit from it.

N: Is this a one time payment?

E: It's an insurance coverage. [N: I see] Insurance coverage. But he was, as I say, only a year. And so the insurance didn't amount to that much. And of course at that time too it wasn't as good as it would be later on. [N: Umhm] But uh, things after [dogs barks] 1978 of course, the whole picture has been changing rapidly as far as benefits and salaries are concerned. They've just gone up and up. So it was uh, I was there at a time when it was more or less minimum for everything.

N: Yeah. What about (--) But you had never been layed-off.

E: No, never.

N: What was it like for the people that were layed-off? Do you (--)

E: Oh that, that was really sad. It uh, in the beginning there was no unemployment insurance either.

N: Oh really! And these are not strikers. These are people that were just (--)

E: People who were layed-off [N: layed-off], because of working conditions. [N: Uh huh] It was (--) Of course I never experienced it. I did live through the depression, which was [N: umhm] bad enough. But when unemployment insurance took effect, that was a real boom and a great advancement for workers. But I, there again I think it was uh, people took advantage of it. You know, they'd work just till a certain period a time and then they could, they could quit in a sense [N: umhm] and get unemployment for x number of weeks to carry them through and then start working again. It's been an abused thing, but a very good piece of legislation, really.

N: Umhm, umhm, umhm. Do you remember hearing about the people who were layed-off by Sprague? How they fed their families, or how they coped before unemployment?

E: No, I don't know anything about that actually. I can only imagine what it must have been for some. [N: Uh huh] But I guess a lot of people left the area when they had to. [N: Umhm] When they were layed-off.

N: Did Sprague then take them back first when they re-employed?

E: Yes. I guess there was seniority ruled. And those who had been working the longest were brought back first.

N: What do you think about when you look back on your years at Sprague? What stands out in your mind?

E: Well I don't have any strong feelings one way or the other. I grew up knowing you have to have some sort of employment. And I felt fortunate that I went from the Arnold Print Works into Sprague. And uh, always felt comfortable and satisfied working there. Um, I don't have any feelings one way or the other.

N: You mentioned that there were some things you'd do differently.

E: Yes. I think I might be a bit more aggressive second time around.

N: In what way?

E: Well looking after my, myself in the sense that I might pursue the idea that I did do a lot of overtime and hadn't been paid for it, and suggest that maybe the raise I got was not enough to, to compensate me for it. [N: Umhm] I'm sure a good many people argue for their raises and so forth. I never did. I always took what came.

N: Umhm. What about your feeling towards the union? I think last time you said that, and this time too you sort of implied that you felt that the union had been beneficial for the workers.

E: Oh I'm sure whenever they made any gain, we gained also. We who were not in the union gained also, which is a bit unfair in a sense. They did all of the work and we did reap some of the benefit. But I always felt (--) I guess I'm so old that I grew up when loyalty to the employer was strong. [N: Umhm] And unions sort of broke down that loyalty. And I just had a natural, or unnatural you might say, feeling that unions were not good. I take that back now. I feel that they did accomplish a great deal. And you're going to have to look at it from the good side. [N: umhm] But they did benefit the workers, [N: umhm] no question about that. [N: Umhm] But I don't think I could ev (--) I would never (--) At that time I never felt I wanted to punch a clock. And that was part of being in the union.

N: Oh really?

E: Yes. And I never did punch a clock. Um, there was something about regimentation that goes against the grain for me. And the unionizing is regimentation in a sense. But uh, I respect the people who, who did work to get better benefits for all of the workers. And uh, I've mellowed quite a bit in that respect. [N: Umhm, umhm]

N: You talked also about your loyalty and the salary you received, and then finding out later that other people had higher salaries, was that it? Or it was more than (--)

E: Yes. There were people that I'm sure were not as capable, and yet I know they reaped benefits that I didn't have. [N: Umhm, umhm]

N: Were these people in the offices?

E: Yes. Not in my office, but in (--) You know there were numerous offices in Sprague. [N: Uh huh] Um, I was as I said, in the what we called "Mahogany Rowe", which was up in the executive offices. [N: Umhm] But uh, some of the girls in the other offices were doing quite well I'm sure. [N: Umhm]

N: These were the clerks who may, or may not have been secretaries.

E: Yeah, they were what I would call clerks. But they, [N: Uh huh] they took the title of secretary just the same. [N: Uh huh]

N: How would you handle that whole thing differently now?

E: It would be rather difficult knowing that you can't go back. I don't spend too much time beyond having the thought that well I, I perhaps could have done a few things differently. But uh (--)

N: What, what things would you have done differently?

E: As I said before, just pursuing the angle that I was a loyal worker and I did work overtime without getting paid for it. And uh, I, I could have pushed I'm sure. Been more aggressive. [N: umhm] But I was not an aggressive person at that time. [N: Yeah] There was a point in the war when (--) Not in the war, it was afterward, where we did uh, benefit with salary plus overtime. Now I just can't remember what period that was. It wasn't when I was leaving. I know I wasn't on it then. I was straight salary. But there was a brief period when it was salary plus overtime.

N: So you were really compensated for (--)

E: That, that time. That was very beneficial. But that was for quite a short period as far as I was concerned. [N: Umhm] And I, I just can't remember what point that (--) It doesn't seem like it was during the war, but afterward. [N: Umhm, when you went] It might have been one of the benefits of the union. I don't know. [N: Yeah] I don't recall at this time. [N: Umhm]

N: I wonder uh, all through our two interviews the idea of loyalty has come up. And your loyalty to Sprague. I wonder, do you ever feel that they took advantage of your good nature and your loyalty?

E: Not in a sense that, of deliberate taking. [N: Umhm] When I first went to work my mother said to me, "now you're going to work and you should be thankful for a job." Don't look at the clock, and don't be afraid to do more than you're asked to do. That was the premise on which I did all of my work I guess, from the time I started till I finished. [N: Umhm] It was just ingrained to take that approach. So really, what happened was a natural sequence of events. [N: It, everything was (--)] I couldn't expect anything different.

N: Everything was consistent with that belief.

E: That's right. Yes. [N: Yeah] I never had any antagonism to anybody I worked with immediately, or any associates. [N: Umhm] I always liked the people I worked with. I don't think I could have worked if I didn't feel friendly toward people. I often think about um, speaking of war effort and if you're doing, making some product that is destructive to others, just how the Christian point of view should apply. I, it's, it's nice theory to talk about, but when your bread and butter depends upon your weekly [N: umhm] salary, you just have to disregard those things sometimes. And Sprague was making products that went into killing devices. [N: Umhm] If we were squeamish about that perhaps none of us would have been working. But you didn't think of it in those terms. [N: Umhm] And especially when you're pushing paper and not making some profit. You don't see it.

N: You're not see (--) You don't see it, it's not in your hand.

E: Yes, that's right, but still it's no excuse. [N: Yeah] It's nice to have good ideas and theories about loving your neighbor and your enemy. But when there's a war on, people's perceptions change a bit.

N: Umhm. Well, we had an enemy.

E: Yes. Yes we did and we had to overcome that especially in World War II.

N: Did anybody else mention this? They had a few qualms about (–)

E: I think we bandied the idea around a few times, but felt impotent to do anything to change it actually.

N: Umhm.

E: It's (–) High ideals are not to be discredited, but we can only hope that as time goes on civilization will get to the point where we won't be required to make death dealing devices anymore. [N: Umhm] And therefore nobody will be involved one way or the other.

N: Yeah. It sounds like it was something that was in your mind though.

E: Oh yes. Yes. It, it, you can't help it really. [N: Umhm] But it would take a strong unity of workers to refuse to, to work on any project that was uh, to be destructive, the ultimate endless destruction.

N: Uh huh.

E: I read in the paper just this week about a man in G.E. who had, and engineer who came to that conclusion and finally asked to be transferred to a non-combative position.

N: Umhm. Pretend that you, the phone rings someday and it's somebody from Sprague asking you to come back for three hours in the morning with a marvelous salary that will increase your pension. And, but that you will have to do something that indirectly involves devices that kill people. How would you feel about it now?

E: Well uh, if you hadn't put that later clause on, I, I would say yes.

N: Which later clause?

E: You know, that it was to involved working on destructive devices. If it was just to go back to work and push paper, I'd probably jump at it. [N: Umhm] I, I often think of it. But at this point in my life I would say if there's destruction involved, no. I can, I'm getting along and I don't have to go back to work. And therefore I can be idealistic and say "no, I want no part of that."

N: Umhm, umhm.

E: But I don't think you can credit me with being an idealist because of that implication. [N: Umhm] That I would work if [few words unclear].

N: Yeah. Did you hear any other people ever talking about how they felt about doing [unclear].

E: No, only in general terms. People would you know, nobody wanted the wars [N: No], or to be a part of any of it. [N: Umhm] But it has been a way of life for so long for the whole universe. I've read that there's still twenty-five wars going, separate wars going on right now. And while they don't touch us immediately, nevertheless reading about them, seeing it on television does bare down on people no matter where they live. And it does contribute to our feelings of desperation sometimes [N: Umhm], and frustration.

N: Umhm. Do you think in terms of the Vietnam War that because so much of it was on television [E: oh yes] that it strengthened people's feelings about [violence?].

E: I, I, it's my theory, and I suppose it's not a very logical one, but it's my theory that if another war started, if they wanted to send the troops down to South America or something, that the young people would not go. And I would applaud them. [N: Umhm] I, I, I hope they won't go into another war, because history has shown up that we have never settled or improved much (--)

SIDE I END

SIDE II BEGINS

Side II begins with interviewer in mid-sentence:

N: Talking about what might happen in terms of future [scurries?], or wars.

E: Well I may be very illogical and I suppose I am, I'll admit I am, but it is my sincere feeling that there are people with, the young people would not be pulled into another war. [Sound of chimes in background] I think they learn this from Vietnam. And I would support anybody who refused to go and fight on foreign soil for any purpose. [N: Umhm] Because it just doesn't settle anything. [N: Umhm] We've got to learn to arbitrate and sit around a table and talk things out. [N: Umhm] It's the only civilized way to settle disputes and not to get violent. It's time man emerged from violence [N: yes] into peaceful and understanding ways of combating differences.

N: Yeah. I remember early on in our first interview you mentioned something about the Manhattan Project. [E: Yes] Now Sprague did something that was involved?

E: Oh yes, we were involved very much so in that, yes.

N: Do you know what it was specifically?

E: No, because we made numerous components that went into various devices you see. [N: Oh really] And it could have been maybe uh, I think, I think it was the missile project. You know, we were, we were running neck and neck with Germany and these missiles that would be projected for great distances.

N: This is in the seventies now, or?

E: Uh, this was in the uh, forties.

N: Oh I see.

E: Yeah. And uh, I, that was part of the Manhattan Project.

N: I see.

E: Yeah. The nu (--) Not nuclear, but atomic [N: umhm] business. It was part of the atomic [unclear].

N: Do you remember when the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Do you remember being at Sprague and hearing anybody make a connection between the dropping of those bombs and anything that they might have done?

E: I think there was mention that we had some part in it, in a way that we had furnished some of the necessary components. Uh, I know there was great feeling expressed that it was un-ethical to do such great destruction and fell swoop. But I've never been able to justify that personally. What's the difference between killing a thousand people and one fell swoop, or killing them over a protracted period of time by the conventional methods? [N: Umhm] Yes, the destruction was bad and we're still living with the effects of nuclear activity and atomic activity. But it was bound to come. [N: Umhm] And it did save lives too, because it ended the world, the war. [N: Umhm] I don't know.

N: Is there anything else you'd like to mention about your time at Sprague?

E: No, I think I covered more than I even thought I was covered. Scratching the surfaces of memory. Brought up things that I'd forgotten actually. [N: Yeah] I'm sure there are people who can give you a lot more information that I've given you. More detailed.

N: This has been (--) I've enjoyed this very much. This has been wonderful.

E: Well I hope it's help in some way [N: it did] and I'm sure there would be people who would question what, some of the things I've said, you know, because their attitude and their response was different.

N: Absolutely! [E: Yeah, sure] I'm sure that everybody has a different viewpoint about some of the things that went on.

E: Yeah, yeah, but that's the way it was with me.

N: Yeah. That's what I wanted to know, is what, the way you saw things.

E: That's the way I saw it.

N: I think Sprague was very lucky to have you.

E: Well, it was mutual. At that time, yes indeed.

SIDE II ENDS